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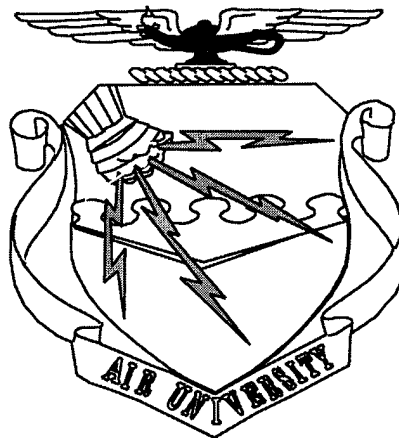
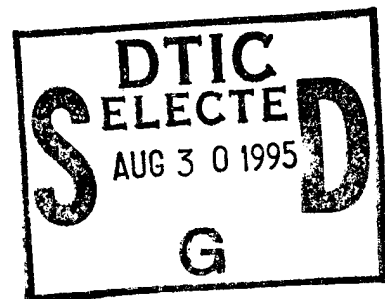
The Comptroller Reservists in the Air Force Reserve:
Are They Prepared for War?

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PMCS IDEA PAPER

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PREPARED FOR WAR?

PMCS CLASS: 95-D

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

My idea paper was written to enhance the comptroller reservist Top Dollar program, a program developed in the wake of the Persian Gulf War to train financial management personnel for real-world contingency operations. Several recommendations are made that may improve the readiness of our comptroller reservists. Some of these recommendations, such as having several civilian positions in finance converted to air reserve technician positions and eliminating total quality management as a training tool, are controversial. Others, you will find, are minor but worthy of consideration. In any case, my suggestions are for improving the military readiness of our Air Force Reserve (AFRES) comptroller reservists.

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INTRODUCTION

There is an old story about a general of an army who was reluctant to engage the enemy because one of his best fighting units had not yet reached the battlefield, proper. When asked why he had not gone ahead with the attack as commanded, the general replied, "I never like to go into battle with one boot off." Finance personnel, including comptroller reservists, obviously are not the other "boot" when it comes to fighting a war. However, all organizations within the military (and this includes the comptroller community), must be fully prepared to perform their wartime tasking if an operation is to be a success. Comptroller reservists, as a vital part of our combat ready force, must have all the skills necessary to perform in the next deployment. It is critical for accomplishing their mission and the overall mission of our deployed forces in future contingency operations.

At the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War in March of 1991, the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force Financial Management and Comptroller (SAF/FM), realizing that the comptroller community had not been fully prepared for the operation, called for initial thoughts on the comptroller involvement during that conflict. Many reviews and meetings were conducted to assess the performance of financial management personnel, and the responses were consolidated into fifteen major categories. Two years later, the "Top Dollar Competition" program was born to encourage major commands throughout the Air Force to train their financial management personnel to respond to real-world contingency operations. We in the Air Force Reserve (AFRES) took these "lessons learned" and the Top Dollar program and expended a lot of effort and money in preparing our comptroller reservists for future contingencies. Unfortunately, all of the planning and practice associated with preparing for the next operation still leaves you with the overriding question, "Are we

ready for war?"

Of course, only time (and the next major conflict) will answer that question. In the meantime, it is our responsibility to make sure that our personnel are fully prepared to execute their duties of financial support in a hostile environment. Although the Top Dollar program is in full implementation in the AFRES command, I believe that improvements can be made that will enhance that training. This paper will discuss some additional measures that need to be taken if the comptroller reservist is to become completely ready to mobilize and deploy for the next war.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of Top Dollar gave new direction to the comptroller reservist program. Prior to the Persian Gulf War, comptroller reservists were trained for supporting active duty bases when the need arose. Training consisted of two days per month at the reserve unit and two weeks of active duty training per year, preferably at an active duty Air Force installation. No mobility tasking existed. Top Dollar assigned a new mobilization tasking to the comptroller reservists, changing the very nature of the program.

After the war ended, the Top Dollar program (at the AFRES command) was created to focus training around the new mobility tasking assigned to the comptroller reservists. The reservists became members of ten-person Top Dollar finance teams that deployed along with the rest of the reserve unit, when mobilized. This new wartime tasking "breathed" new life into the previously stale, hum-drum, month-to-month comptroller reservist program.

Within AFRES, the Top Dollar program is in high gear. Many of the Top Dollar finance teams have already competed with each other at Camp Swift, Texas. Comptroller reservists from several of the AFRES installations meet in

competition during a five-day training exercise in the spring and fall of each year. Staff members from AFRES and civilian comptrollers from the AFRES installations act as role players, simulating a wartime scenario for the participating teams. Other training consists of a five-day initial Top Dollar training course, held in various locations throughout the US, and training in the Top Dollar curriculum at the home station every month, during the two-day reserve training weekend. The Top Dollar competition at Camp Swift is a highly-charged and intense five days; it's as close to being in a real contingency that you can provide for the reservists. But what about the home station training? Are we providing the necessary environment, support, and time in making the training weekend as focused on Top Dollar as we should?

Perhaps. But if you stop to consider the enormous responsibility now placed on comptroller personnel to perform their tasks along-side the war fighters, you get a sense of how important it is to be totally prepared for providing financial support in deployed locations. My ideas that follow will add to the preparation of the Top Dollar program in the Air Force Reserve.

First, at most AFRES installations there are no air reserve technicians (ART) working in the comptroller office. That is, all positions in the financial management office are occupied by civilian civil servants. AFRES does have plans to ART one position per installation in the comptroller office, realizing the necessity of having a full-time employee involved in reserve activities. The ART would perform duties associated with financial management five days per week and, during the training weekend, don the military uniform and continue those duties as a reservist. (This is the "dual status" concept of the ART program.) However, I believe that more ART positions should be established, which would increase the number of technicians trained in the various funding and accounting procedures of the

financial management field. Whenever you centralize information under one person or ART, everyone else becomes reliant on that person and less well-informed of their responsibilities. Every airman needs to know what is expected of him or her if success is to be achieved. With increased numbers of ART personnel, technical competence of the deployable Top Dollar finance team would increase, eliminating the dependence on the one "knowledgeable source" syndrome that would exist with only one ART assigned to the ten-person team.

Second, the civilian comptroller should be given the responsibility of being the lead comptroller reservist's rating supervisor. Currently, the comptroller reservist officer is graded by the air commander. The commander, in the area of financial management, is unaware of the role of the comptroller reservist program. Whenever it is time for the commander to rate the comptroller reservist officer-in-charge, seldom is the civilian comptroller even consulted on the goings-on of the Top Dollar program. Without the input of someone who is in daily contact with the program, how can a fair evaluation be performed? By allowing the civilian comptroller to be the evaluator of the reservist comptroller, a complete appraisal of the person and the program can be a very valuable tool in keeping the program on track.

In that vein, have the civilian comptroller begin making quarterly or semi-annual update reports on the status of the comptroller reservist program. With all of the emphasis now being placed on the reserves as a whole, an evaluation by someone at the installation level would keep the program visible and on track.

Third, we need to eliminate all ancillary training that does not include Top Dollar responsibilities. Obviously, this flies in the face of current conventional thinking. However, if you consider matters such as total quality

management (TQM), sexual harassment, alcohol abuse, etc., the citizen soldier (in this case, the citizen airman), gets this same training at his or her civilian job. In the case of TQM, AFRES installations spend thousands of dollars each year teaching this training to members who have already received such indoctrination from their civilian employer. Often, the AFRES training in these areas is actually lacking in the latest teaching techniques being employed by private industry, where our airmen have been exposed to newer or updated learning and management theories on total quality. The same can be said of the other social action programs.

Next, at the AFRES installations, there are actually two ten-person Top Dollar teams assigned and training in the finance office. During the reserve training weekend, there are twenty comptroller reservists assembling for duty in offices that can only house up to fifteen people. As you can imagine, finding work becomes secondary to finding a place to work! The organization might be better served by adding a training weekend and assigning one of the two teams to reschedule their training.

Finally, have the reservist financial teams deploy each year of their annual tour to a cross-service installation. With the current downsizing of the military services, more and more training and exercises are being performed as joint operations. The purpose of this type of training is to foster cooperation between the different Department of Defense (DoD) agencies. If the AFRES Top Dollar financial teams could train at Navy or Army installations, they could get a better sense of the different types of unique situations that are inherent with each service. If this is not feasible, perhaps joint Top Dollar training scenarios could be established by the services, i.e., have Navy and Army reserve Top Dollar teams join the AFRES Top Dollar teams at Camp Swift.

CONCLUSION

The Top Dollar program, as it exists today, has transformed the AFRES financial management community from one of being unprepared for wartime tasking to a community of highly dedicated, highly dependable airmen ready to respond to real-world contingency operations. The military readiness of these individuals is virtually complete. However, with such a heightened sense of responsibility now being placed on financial support in the field, developing the skills needed for operating in a combat zone are constantly in need of evaluation and refinement.

None of the suggestions I have written here should be construed as an indictment of the AFRES Top Dollar program. The AFRES financial management office is doing an outstanding job in implementing Top Dollar throughout the command. My purpose here has been to propose additional possible improvements to the readiness training of our comptroller reservists. Future contingencies will call for the best trained financial personnel to serve in the same theater as our combat forces. Our servicemen on the front lines don't need to be burdened with thoughts of financial problems because of a less-than-professional and competent resolution to a pay problem by field finance personnel. After all, going into battle with one "boot" off is a recipe for disaster. By having our comptroller reservists fully trained, both "boots" will be on when the enemy is finally engaged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Make two or three financial management positions within the AFRES comptroller offices into air reserve technician (ART) slots.

2. Have the lead comptroller reservist report to the civilian comptroller for rating purposes.

3. The civilian comptroller should make semi-annual status reports on the Top Dollar program at installation level.

4. Consider the elimination of non-combat, social action type training. Concentrate reservist training on Top Dollar preparation and physical training.

5. Have separate training weekends for the finance teams. The current format calls for two ten-person teams training the same weekend. This causes an over-crowded situation to exist in finance offices not designed to accommodate more than fifteen to eighteen personnel.

6. Make the ten-person Top Dollar finance teams deploy together to other than Air Force installations for annual tours. Performing either in Army or Navy offices or making a Top Dollar training pilgrimage every summer would be in order.

The above recommendations are directed to the Air Force Reserve Financial Management and Comptroller, Robins AFB, GA.